EPIC COMICS

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SIX FROM SIRIUS 2

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SIX FROM SIRIUS II 2
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Following disastrous treachery on Heavenstone, Jakosa Lone, Zematin-Lar, Starn, LaMasque, Grod, and Skreed are returning to Sirius Hub (to deliver their resignations from service) when they are intercepted and attacked by a Hub ship bearing a crew of archeologists. The six retaliate, gutting the Sirian ship, but not before their own ship is crippled. They must now board the Sirian wreck in hopes of cannibalizing parts . . .

Meanwhile, a team of ruthless mercenaries called the Ghost-Makers (led by Jakosa's oldest rival, Valis) has been hired to take over the security of a Sirian archeological dig on Planet-X, where the objective is to excavate one or more "gateways" to other dimensions . . .

Aboard the gutted archeological ship, Zematin-Lar plumbs the computer to learn that she and her fellow agents are now wanted fugitives. Moments later, the wreck is surrounded by Sirian defense ships pulled from orbit around nearby Planet-X. Facing capture, Jakosa extracts Zematin-Lar's psyche and hides the emptied facsimile body she had been inhabiting. Thus, only five of the six fugitives are (visibly) delivered into the custody of Lt. Demandros, current head of Planet-X security and another of Jakosa's old acquaintances. Reluctantly placing the five in an excavated prison within the alien ruins, Demandros leaves to greet the arrival of the man replacing him.

But once cleared through the orbital defense net, Valis and his Ghost-Makers brutally attack the dig-site whose security they have agreed to ensure . . .

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EYETEETH PART II

THE GHOST-MAKERS

THE HUB COLLABORATORS BE *DAMNED* FOR THE STUPID FOOLS THEY *ARE*--BUT *I* SHOULD HAVE *KNOWN* VALIS WOULD TRY SOMETHING LIKE THIS!

THEY'RE DISPERSING IN *PODS*, LT. DEMANDROS!

ALL DEFENSES --CHANGE YOUR TARGETS!

BUT YOU SAID TO LOCK ALL CANNONS ON THE *MAIN SHIP--!*

CANCEL THAT ORDER!
ALL CANNONS --FIRE AT WILL ON ANYTHING IN THE SKY!
BUT FOR MOST OF THE GROUND DEFENSES--
--IT IS TOO LATE!
WHRAMM
NICELY DONE, XEKROS-- AND DESERVING OF A REWARD...
DEPLOYING K-9 BACKUP UNITS--
"--NOW!"

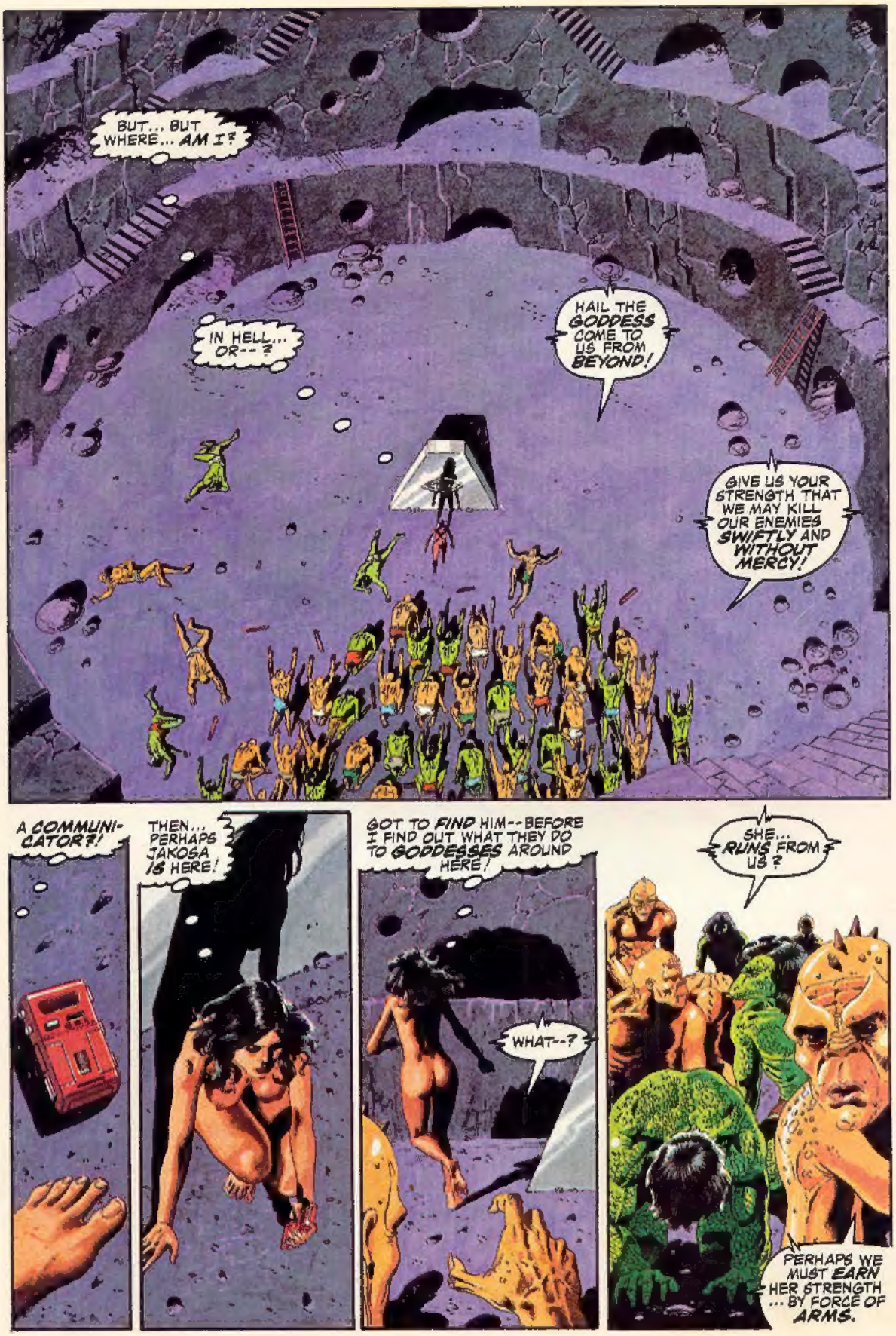
GOT ANY KIDS?
THREE.
SAY THEIR NAMES.
REMEMBER THEIR FACES.
TO HELL WITH THE ATTACK--AND TO HELL WITH THE GATEWAY TOO! I'M AN ARCHEOLOGIST--AND THESE ARTIFACTS ARE PRECIOUS IN THEIR OWN RIGHT!
WILL YOU TALK SOME SENSE INTO HIM?!
THOSE ARE K-9s OUT THERE! IF WE DON'T CLEAR OUT SOON--
ZHURM
ZHURM
ZHURM
ZHURM
ZHURM
ZHURM
ZHURM

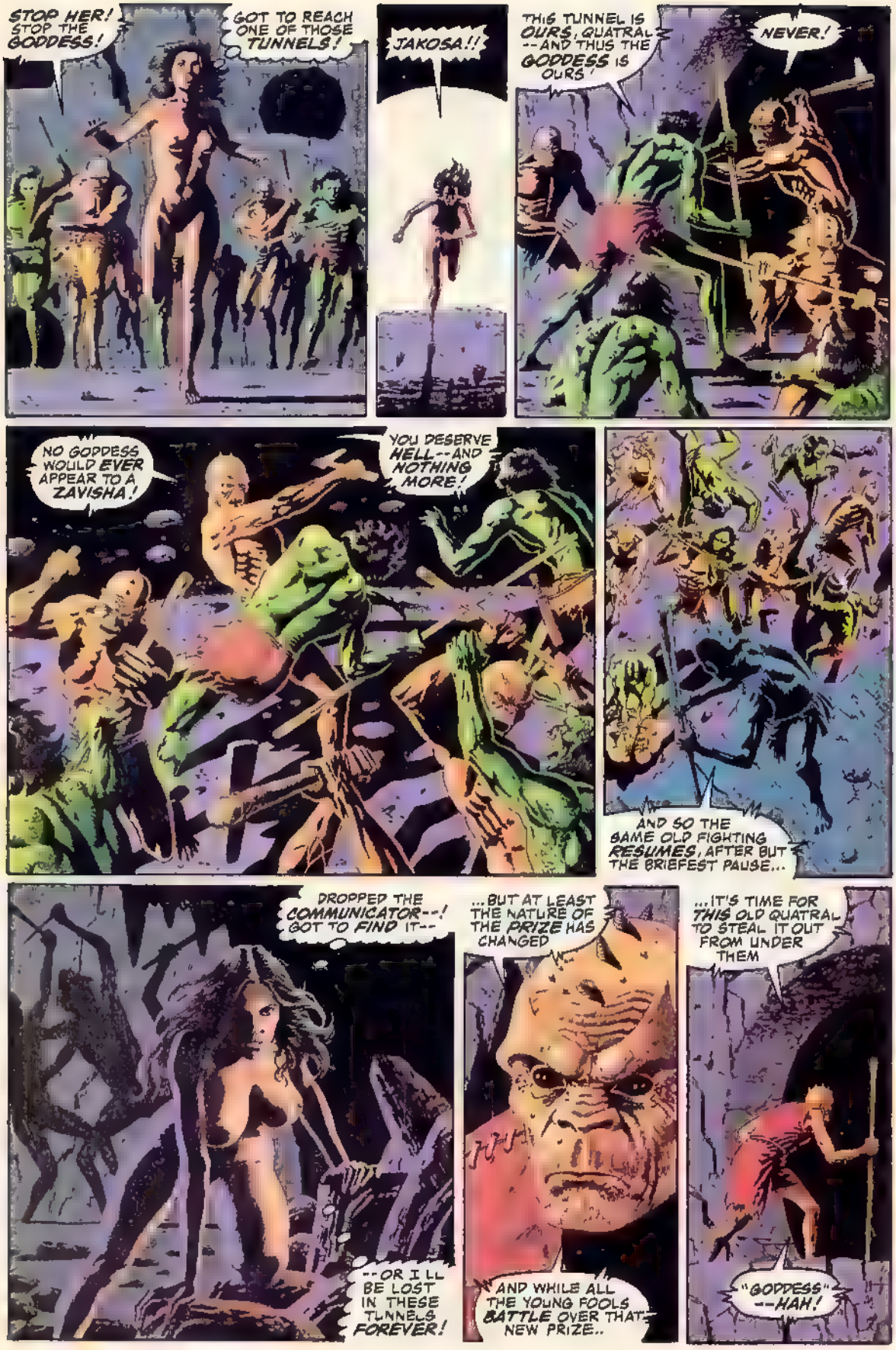
ZHURM
EEYAAAAAAAAA!
MY MEN... AND THOSE I'VE BEEN CHARGED TO PROTECT...
...ALL OF THEM...
NO USE, JAKOSA... CAN'T REACH THE GUARD'S KEYS OR EVEN--
DEMANDROS! LET US OUT--OR WE'LL DIE LIKE DOGS TRAPPED IN HERE!
Y-YES... WHAT DOES IT MATTER... NOW...
WEAPONS, DEMANDROS-- TELL US WHERE TO FIND SOME WEAPONS!
BUT WE CAN HELP, DEMANDR--
NO--NO WEAPONS.
SHUT UP!

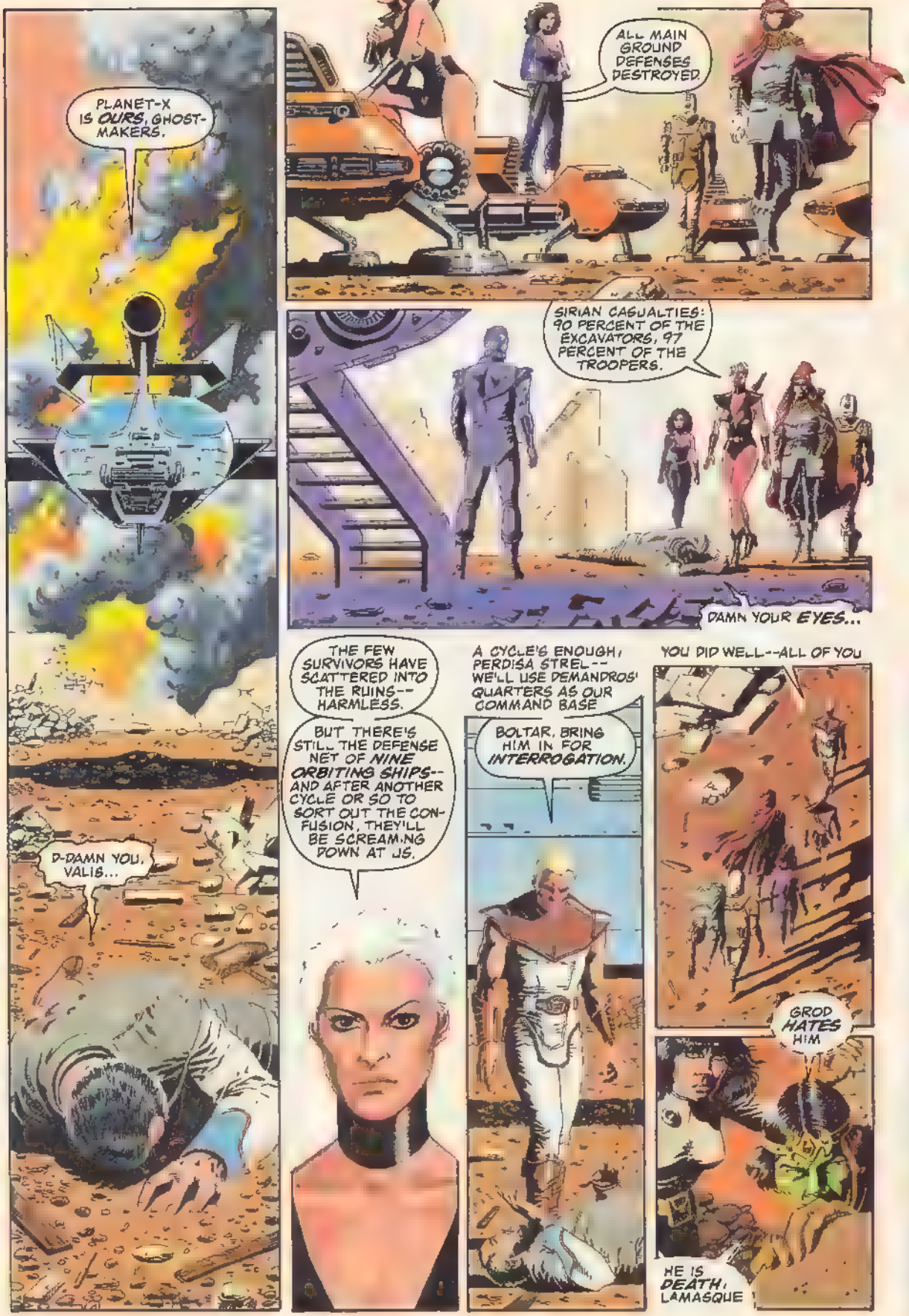
GO! SAVE YOUR LIVES IF YOU CAN--BUT I'LL NOT GIVE YOU THE MEANS TO SEAL THE OTHER END OF THIS TRAP!
WHAT?! YOU THINK WE'RE PART OF THIS TREACHERY?!
IN LEAGUE WITH VALIS?!
YOU KNOW WHAT HAPPENED WITH SHARDREENA! DON'T YOU REALIZE WHAT VALIS WOULD LIKE TO DO TO ME?!
HE'S UNHINGED, JAKOSA.
HIS MIND'S GONE.
JUST GO, DAMN YOU! FOR THE SAKE OF THE PAST AND NOTHING ELSE, JAKOSA, SAVE YOUR LIFE IF YOU CAN! AND IF YOU WON'T GO, I'LL--
ZHURM
AGH-H!
DEMANDROS!
ZHURM
ZHURM
SCATTER, JAKOSA!
INTO THE RUINS!

ZHURM
KROOM
ROKT
MOVE, GROD--AND HOPE THOSE K-9s LOCK ON OTHER BODY HEAT!
DON'T KNOW WHERE I'M SENDING YOU, ZEMMIE... OR EVEN WHAT I'M DOING TO YOU...
...BUT YOU MAY BE THE ONLY ONE OF US WITH ANY CHANCE...
...AND IF I'M WRONG...
...I'LL COME BACK FOR YOU.
IT... IT WAS LIKE BEING ASLEEP... AND NOW I'M AWAKENING... BEING FREED FROM THE FALSE TOOTH...
BUT... WHY IS IT STILL SO DARK?
NEW BODY... LIKE MY OWN... NOT PHAEDRA'S...
JAKOSA? WHERE AM I?
THAT LIGHT... DRAWING ME FORWARD... GOT TO REACH IT...

"... SEE WHERE IT LEADS..."
KILL!
ONCE AND FOR ALL--TAKE THE GODHEAD!
WHAT IN THE--?!
LOOK!
THE GOD--HE HAS SENT HIS DAUGHTER--TO HELP US WIN THE ETERNAL WAR!
WRONG, ZAVISHA--THE GODDESS HAS BEEN SENT TO US!
OH MY GOD...I... I DON'T HAVE A NEW BODY!
OH?
SOMEHOW I'VE "COME BACK TO LIFE"... BETWEEN BODIES--RECONSTITUTED IN THE MEMORY OF MY OLD BODY!
SOLID OR NOT, I...I'M ONLY A... GHOST!


BUT... BUT WHERE... AM I?
IN HELL... OR--?
HAIL THE GODDESS COME TO US FROM BEYOND!
GIVE US YOUR STRENGTH THAT WE MAY KILL OUR ENEMIES SWIFTLY AND WITHOUT MERCY!
A COMMUNI-CATOR?!
THEN... PERHAPS JAKOSA IS HERE!
GOT TO FIND HIM--BEFORE I FIND OUT WHAT THEY DO TO GODDESSES AROUND HERE!
WHAT--?
SHE... RUNS FROM US?
PERHAPS WE MUST EARN HER STRENGTH ... BY FORCE OF ARMS.

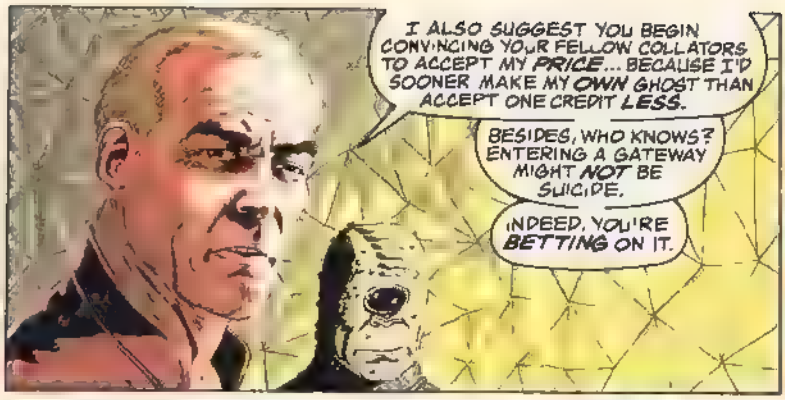

STOP HER! STOP THE GODDESS!
GOT TO REACH ONE OF THOSE TUNNELS!
JAKOSA!!
THIS TUNNEL IS OURS, QUATRAL --AND THUS THE GODDESS IS OURS!
NEVER!
NO GODDESS WOULD EVER APPEAR TO A ZAVISHA!
YOU DESERVE HELL--AND NOTHING MORE!
AND SO THE SAME OLD FIGHTING RESUMES, AFTER BUT THE BRIEFEST PAUSE...
DROPPED THE COMMUNICATOR--! GOT TO FIND IT--
--OR I'LL BE LOST IN THESE TUNNELS FOREVER!
...BUT AT LEAST THE NATURE OF THE PRIZE HAS CHANGED
AND WHILE ALL THE YOUNG FOOLS BATTLE OVER THAT NEW PRIZE..
...IT'S TIME FOR THIS OLD QUATRAL TO STEAL IT OUT FROM UNDER THEM
"GODDESS" --HAH!

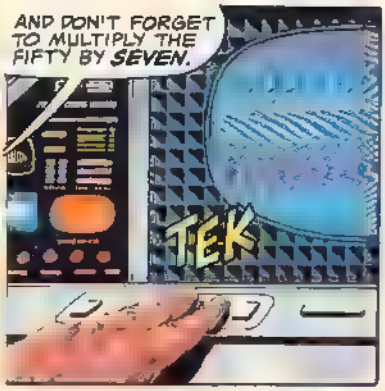

PLANET-X IS OURS, GHOST-MAKERS.
ALL MAIN GROUND DEFENSES DESTROYED.
SIRIAN CASUALTIES: 90 PERCENT OF THE EXCAVATORS, 97 PERCENT OF THE TROOPERS.
DAMN YOUR EYES...
D-DAMN YOU, VALIS...
THE FEW SURVIVORS HAVE SCATTERED INTO THE RUINS--HARMLESS.
BUT THERE'S STILL THE DEFENSE NET OF NINE ORBITING SHIPS--AND AFTER ANOTHER CYCLE OR SO TO SORT OUT THE CONFUSION, THEY'LL BE SCREAMING DOWN AT US.
A CYCLE'S ENOUGH, PERDISA STREL--WE'LL USE DEMANDROS' QUARTERS AS OUR COMMAND BASE
BOLTAR, BRING HIM IN FOR INTERROGATION.
YOU DID WELL--ALL OF YOU
GROD HATES HIM
HE IS DEATH, LAMASQUE

NIGHT IN THE RUINS'
GIVE T JP, STARN--YOU LOOK LIKE A GHOUL.
JUST CAN'T BELIEVE IT--GOT TO BE ONE UNDAMAGED WEAPON--SOMEWHERE.
MAYBE NOT --VALIS' CREW WAS GOOD.
YEAH-- CLOCKWORK KILLERS
NEVER SEEN A TEAM OPERATION EXECUTED WITH SUCH EFFICIENCY-- DECIMATED THE SIRIANS N A SINGLE STRIKE.
AND THOSE DAMNED K-9 UNITS ARE HUNTING DOWN THE REST OF THEM.
THEM, SKREED?
WHAT ABOUT US?
YES... WE DID "WELL"...
...ALL OF US
AND ARE YOU NOT AS PROUD AS THE REST OF US.
...FAVORED CHELANDRIA?
FRANKLY, PERDISA, NO.
WE'VE KILLED BEFORE--BUT NEVER LIKE THIS.
THE STAKES WERE NEVER THIS HIGH.
WHAT STAKES?

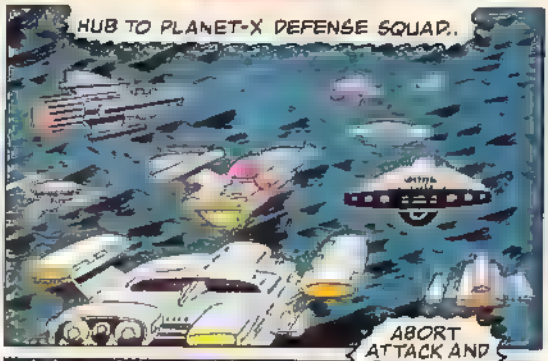
ALL WE'VE REAPED SO FAR IS DEATH, MAKING US VERY RICH INDEED...
IN BLOOD.
I HOPE YOU'RE NOT GETTING SOFT, CHELANDRIA...
YOUR LOVER WOULDN'T LIKE THAT.
I TELL YOU I DON'T KNOW, VALIS...
AND I SAY YOU'RE LYING, DEMANDROS.
FOR THE LAST TIME--WHERE'S THE GATEWAY?
WE..WE HAVEN'T FOUND IT YET... STILL LOOKING... STILL EXCAVATING...
THE SIRIAN DEFENSE SHIPS ARE MAKING THEIR MOVE, VALIS...
DEET DEET DEET
ALL NINE OF THEM BREAKING ORBIT--COMING DOWN TO POUND US.
ALL RIGHT, BOLTAR--PATCH US THROUGH TO HUB, AND TELL THEM WHO IT IS...
KORAGSA WILL COME ON FOR ME...
AND XEKROS, THAT'LL DO FOR NOW--THE SOLDIER-BOY MUST BE TELLING THE TRUTH, UNFORTUNATELY.
VERY WELL ...AND SO, TO SLEEP.
TSSSSS

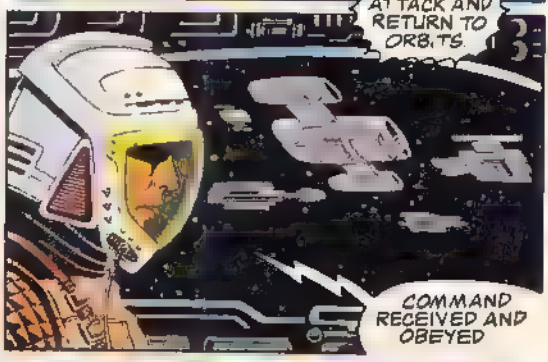
YOU WERE RIGHT, VALIS--KORASSA'S COMING ON NOW.
VALIS! HOW DARE YOU--
VIOLATE OUR CONTRACT, KORASSA?
I DARE BECAUSE IT'S TIME TO MAKE A NEW DEAL.
FOR ONE MILLION CREDITS, YOU HIRED MY GHOST-MAKERS TO SECURE THE SEARCH FOR A CERTAIN GATEWAY... BUT I AM NOW PREPARED TO SELL THE GATEWAY ITSELF, FOR FIFTY MILLION CREDITS.
IMPOSSIBLE!
WE WERE IN CONTACT WITH THE EXCAVATING OPERATION RIGHT UP TO THE MOMENT OF YOUR TREACHEROUS ATTACK--
--AND THEY HAD NOT YET FOUND THE GATEWAY!
DO YOU EXPECT ME TO BELIEVE THAT IN THE INTERVENING CYCLE YOU'VE MANAGED TO DO WHAT AN ENTIRE TEAM OF--
I'VE DONE FAR MORE IMPRESSIVE THINGS, KORASSA... BUT NO, I DON'T EXPECT YOU TO BELIEVE IT.
BELIEVE ONLY THIS: LT. DEMANDROS LIED TO YOU
YOU.. YOU MEAN... THEY ACTUALLY DID LOCATE A GATEWAY PRIOR TO YOUR ATTACK?
SEVEN OF THEM THUS FAR, TO BE PRECISE.
BUT... WHY DIDN'T DEMANDROS--
COME, COME, KORASSA-- CAN YOU NOT WEIGH THE VALUE OF JUST ONE GATEWAY AGAINST MERE OFFICER'S PAY?
BUT DEMANDROS WAS THE MOST LOYAL OFFICER IN SIRIAN--
YES--UNTIL YOU REWARDED HIM BY PLACING A RUTHLESS, INSUBORDINATE MERCENARY LIKE ME IN HIGHER COMMAND.
SILENCE.
I SEE YOU'VE FOUND SOMETHING TO BELIEVE IN--IN WHICH CASE I SUGGEST YOU CALL OFF YOUR DOGS--BEFORE THEY INADVERTENTLY DESTROY ALL SEVEN GATEWAYS.


I ALSO SUGGEST YOU BEGIN CONVINCING YOUR FELLOW COLLATORS TO ACCEPT MY PRICE... BECAUSE I'D SOONER MAKE MY OWN GHOST THAN ACCEPT ONE CREDIT LESS.
BESIDES, WHO KNOWS? ENTERING A GATEWAY MIGHT NOT BE SUICIDE.
INDEED, YOU'RE BETTING ON IT.


AND DON'T FORGET TO MULTIPLY THE FIFTY BY SEVEN.
TEK

NOT BAD VALIS.
BOLTAR UNDERSTATES, AS USUAL-- BUT DO YOU REALLY THINK THEY'D CALL OFF THE NINE SHIPS?
DON'T PLAY THE FOOL, XEKROS.


HUB TO PLANET-X DEFENSE SQUAD..


ABORT ATTACK AND RETURN TO ORBITS.
COMMAND RECEIVED AND OBEYED

MUST BE THE DEFENSE SHIPS, GROD. BUT THEY'RE PULLING BACK...
APPARENTLY HUB HAD SECOND THOUGHTS ABOUT HITTING THESE RUINS WHILE GATEWAYS MIGHT STILL BE HERE.

EITHER THAT OR VALIS CAME UP WITH A TRICK OF SOME--
LISTEN, LAMASQUE!

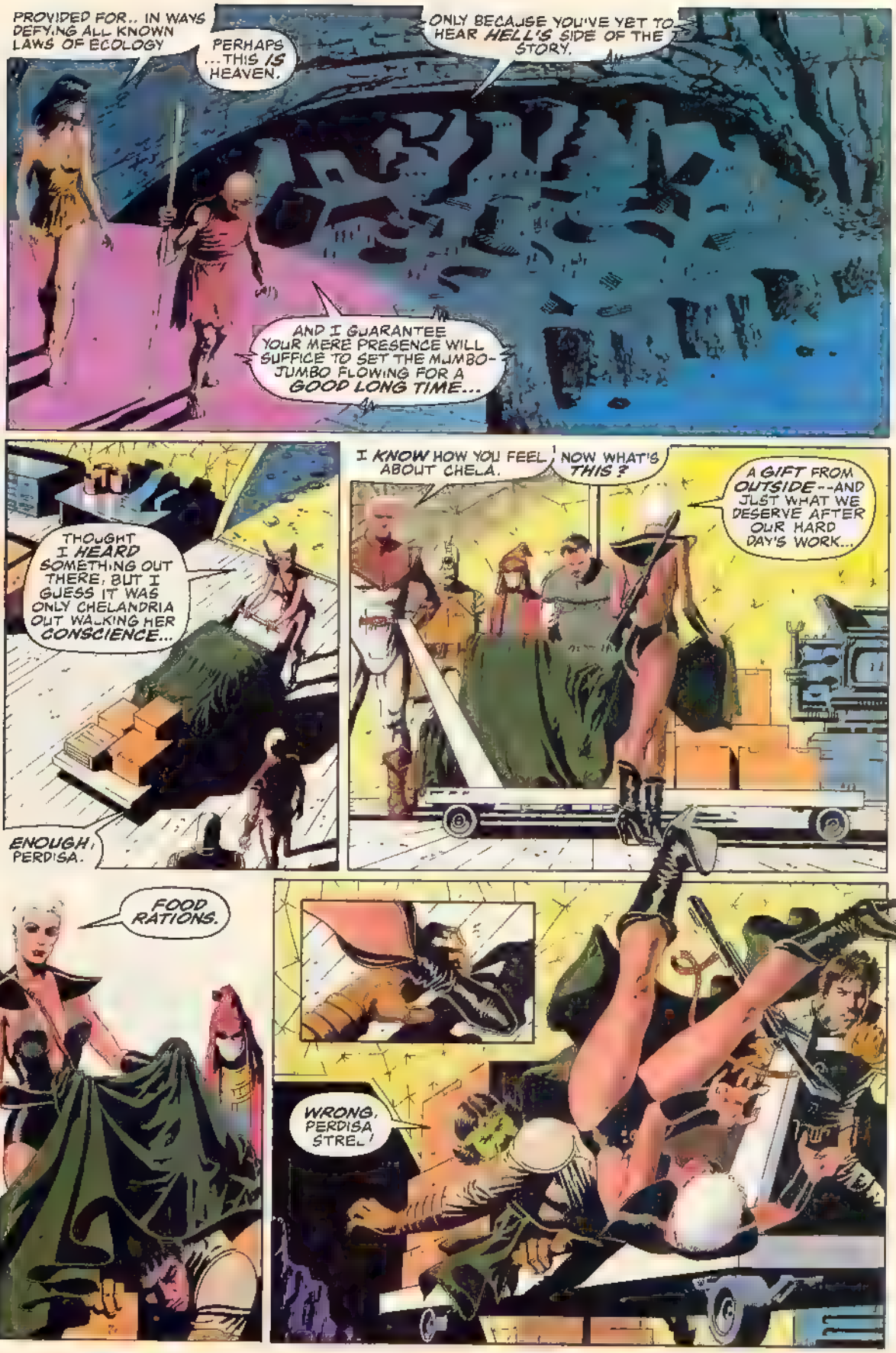
I HEAR
SOMEONE IN THE RUINS-- COMING THIS WAY...

IF THAT'S YOU AND LAMASQUE I HEARD, GROD..
..EASY ON THE SKULL.
IT'S ONLY ME.
AND NOW THAT WE'RE AT LEAST HALF A TEAM.. FIRST ORDER OF BUSINESS:
DEMANDROS SAVED OUR LIVES.
IF HE'S STILL ALIVE, WE OWE HIM.
HE'S ALIVE, JAKOSA
WE SAW HIM TAKEN INTO HIS OWN QUARTERS... FOR "INTERROGATION."
THEN-- KNOWING WHAT VALIS AND HIS GHOST-MAKERS ARE CAPABLE OF, PARTICULARLY THE SADISTIC ONE CALLED XEKROS --WE'VE GOT TO RESCUE HIM, AND FAST.
BUT WITHOUT WEAPONS JAKOSA-- HOW?
SOMETHING SKREED SAID, ABOUT...
YES.
THAT'S PERDISA STREL, VALIS' SECOND IN COMMAND-- LOADING WHAT ARE PROBABLY FOOD RATIONS ONTO THAT CART...
"...AND THE CART MIGHT WELL SERVE AS A 'GATEWAY' IN ITS OWN SMALL RIGHT"

JAKOSA!
DO YOU RECEIVE?
MUST BE FRITZED...
...THOUGH HOW A COMMUNICATOR EVEN GOT HERE WHEREVER HERE IS, I DON'T--
KLAK
KLATTER
A GODDESS? N-NO; I .
WHEN I SAW YOU FROM ON HIGH, I THOUGHT NOT. KNEW NOT.
I AM TOO OLD, TOO WISE, TO BE FOOLED BY SUCH TIDY NONSENSE.
YOU ARE NOT A GODDESS, NEITHER OF ZAVISHA NOR QUATRAL.
WHO... ARE YOU?
A QUATRAL--THE OLDEST AND THUS SMARTEST IN THE HIVE...
...INCLUDING THE ZAVISHAS, MY "GODDESS."

AND YOU, MY GODDESS, ARE FROM THE BEFORE AND THE BEYOND--FROM THE BEGINNING PLACE.
I...I DON'T--
TRUST ME.
I REMEMBER LITTLE BUT I ALONE REMEMBER ENOUGH TO KNOW...
"...UNLIKE THOSE NOW SEARCHING FOR YOU, CHASING YOU, THROUGH THIS VERY CYST-TUNNEL."
NOW COME, INTO MY BURROW PLUGGED BY THESE SKULLS, BEFORE THEY TAKE YOU--
--AND TURN YOU INTO A NEW IDOL FOR THE PURPOSES OF THEIR ETERNAL WAR.
PLAK!
WHO--?!
NOW--
--WHILE SHE'S TURNED THE OTHER WAY.

YOU SHOULD BE FLATTERED, MY GODDESS.
IF YOU KNOW I'M NOT A GODDESS, OLD ONE, WHY DO YOU CALL ME--
FLATTERED BECAUSE BOTH QUATRALS AND ZAVISHA NOW FIGHT OVER THE RIGHT TO WORSHIP YOU.
JUST WHO ARE THE ZAVISHA AND QUATRALS? WHAT IS THIS PLACE?
THIS "PLACE"--THE HIVE-WOMB WITHIN THE VOID--WAS ONCE THOUGHT TO BE HEAVEN...
...BUT IS NOW CONSIDERED HELL.
THE QUATRALS--OF WHICH I AM THE OLDEST AND WISEST--ARE THE DESCENDANTS OF FORMER SLAVES FROM THE BEGINNING PLACE.
THE ZAVISHA ARE THE OTHERS--DESCENDANTS OF OUR FORMER MASTERS.
THIS CHAMBER...SO ...SOOTHING
IT IS ONE OF THE SUCCOR CYSTS, MY GODDESS, WITHOUT WHICH NO ONE--QUATRAL OR ZAVISHA--COULD EXIST IN THE HIVE-WOMB
FLOOR AND WALLS ARE RESILIENT, MY GODDESS ACCOMODATING EVERY CONTOUR OF THE BODY IN MOST RESTFUL FASHION...
AND WHAT'S MORE...
...IT'S EDIBLE, AND QUITE TASTY AT THAT.
HOW AND WHY THE SPONGY MORSEL-LAYER GROWS, IF "GROW" IT DOES, IS A MYSTERY--JUST AS NO ONE KNOWS HOW THE WATER IS REPLENISHED
ALL WE KNOW IS THAT WE ARE SOMEHOW ...PROVIDED FOR.


PROVIDED FOR.. IN WAYS DEFYING ALL KNOWN LAWS OF ECOLOGY
PERHAPS ...THIS IS HEAVEN.
ONLY BECAUSE YOU'VE YET TO HEAR HELL'S SIDE OF THE STORY.
AND I GUARANTEE YOUR MERE PRESENCE WILL SUFFICE TO SET THE MUMBO-JUMBO FLOWING FOR A GOOD LONG TIME...
THOUGHT I HEARD SOMETHING OUT THERE, BUT I GUESS IT WAS ONLY CHELANDRIA OUT WALKING HER CONSCIENCE...
ENOUGH, PERDISA.
I KNOW HOW YOU FEEL ABOUT CHELA.
NOW WHAT'S THIS?
A GIFT FROM OUTSIDE--AND JUST WHAT WE DESERVE AFTER OUR HARD DAY'S WORK...
FOOD RATIONS.
WRONG, PERDISA STREL!

UNFFF!!
GHOST-MAKING DESERVES SOMETHING STRONGER THAN FOOD... PERHAPS EVEN A TASTE OF YOUR OWN MEDICINE...
...BUT WE'LL SETTLE FOR A STANDOFF--
--AND THE SURRENDER OF DEMANDROS.
...A LONG TIME, JAKOSA LONE... SINCE THE DAYS WE TRAINED TOGETHER..
--AND YOU SUFFERED CONSTANT HUMILIATION AT MY HANDS
TIME CHANGES EVERYTHING, VALIS.
AND ALL THE COMPUTER CHATTER ABOUT YOUR "FUGITIVE STATUS" WAS A MERE COVER... OR WAS IT?
IF YOU WERE STILL LOYAL TO HUB, DEMANDROS WOULD NEVER OUTRANK YOU...
COULD IT BE THAT YOU'RE FINALLY FOLLOWING MY EXAMPLE--THAT YOU'RE ALSO A ROGUE ELEMENT IN THIS MATTER?
IF I AM, VALIS, I JUST MIGHT FOLLOW YOUR EXAMPLE ALL THE WAY TO CREATING YOUR GHOST.

BUT NOT NOW? NOT WHILE XEKROS AND BOLTAR ARE JUST ITCHING TO AVENGE MY DEATH?
AS EVER, VALIS--
--WHO AM I TO DISPUTE FIRST IN OUR CLASS?
PERDISA STREL IS AN INCOMPETENT FOOL.
I HOPE THEY TAKE HER VERY FAR AWAY, TO SOMEPLACE VERY COLD, AND KILL HER.
IF WE WERE SMART, GROD, WE'D PROBABLY KILL HER...
AYE, JAKOSA, BUT IF WE WERE THAT SMART--
THUD
--GROD SUSPECTS WE WOULD BE JUST AS DAMNED AS VALIS.
KEEP GOING, DEMANDROS--
I'LL SUPPORT Y--
CH-KLIK
WHO--?

THE NAME IS CHELANDRIA...

...VALIS' LOVER.

AND SHE HOLDS HIS DEATH IN HER HANDS FOR A BEAT OF TEN...

THEN ..

YOU MUST SMELL GOOD, JAKOSA.

HEADY PHEROMONES.

ALL RIGHT, THAT WAS YOUR FULL QUOTA OF MIRACLES FOR *THIS* LIFETIME; SO LET'S *MOVE*--

--BEFORE HER LOVER SHOWS *LESS* MERCY BY USHERING US INTO THE *NEXT*.

:SNF SNF:

THEY WON'T GET FAR, VALIS... K-9 UNITS STILL IN THE TRENCHES... HUNTING DOWN REMAINING SIRIANS... AND NOW THEIR SENSORS WILL LOCK ON JAKOSA AND--

NOT AFTER YOU'VE GONE TO THE SHIP AND *DEACTIVATED* THEM STREL.

WH-WHAT--?!

YOU *HEARD* ME!

I SAID GO BACK AND *CALL OFF THE DOGS* --JAKOSA ALONE IS *MINE*!

FWAK

UHN--!

HOW CAN YOU DRINK THAT RANCID SWILL?
NEITHER NECTAR NOR ELIXIR, STARN..
..BUT TWO MORE SWIGS.
..AND THE MIND WILL NEVER KNOW.
PURE AMBROSIA.
THAT MOUTH OF YOURS, SKREED, IS THE MOST LETHAL WEAPON I'VE EVER KNOWN.
EVERY TIME YOU OPEN IT, I GET A FIERCE PAIN RIGHT IN THE--
STARN
UH OH.
K-9.
YES.
AND I APOLOGIZE, STARN-- FOR EVERY SHUDDER MY POETRY'S EVER INVOKED.
SAVE IT, SKREED--TRUTH TO TELL, YOU'RE THE ONLY ONE WHO EVER MADE ME SMILE INSIDE.
NOW YOU TELL ME
YOU EVER FACE A BETTER TIME?
GUESS NOT FAREWELL, OLD FRIEN--
DUNK!
IT DIED?
MOST PROPITIOUSLY .. AND IN GRATEFUL AWE DO WE LIVE TO GAZE UPON THE WONDER OF--
CUT THE MOUTH, SKREED
YOU'RE GIVING ME A PAIN AGAIN.

WE RE MOVING, JAKOSA, BUT TO WHERE? WHAT NOW?
ONE THING AT A TIME, GROD -- FIRST WE FIND A PLACE TO HOLE UP AND HIDE UNT L DEMANDROS IS FIT TO RUN ON HIS OWN...
THEN WE TRY TO LINK UP WITH STARN AND SKREED...WHERELPON WE GO BACK TO PICK UP ZEMMIE...AND FINALLY--
"PICK HER UP"--?
YOU STASHED ZEMATIN-LAR'S PSYCHE SOMEWHERE IN THESE RUINS?
IN A SOMEWHAT DESPERATE MOMENT, AMASQUE...
.. AND LET'S HOPE WHERE I "STASHED HER IS "IN THESE RUINS "
JAKOSA, WHAT DO YOU--
AND FINALLY WE--
WHAT DO YOU MEAN JAKOSA?
AND FINALLY, WE F ND SOME WAY OUT OF THIS CRUMBLING HELL.
AND SO WE THANK THE WISE ANCIENT FOR USHERING THE GODDESS INTO OUR RANKS --AS WE EMBRACE THIS GOOD OMEN TO OUR FORTUNES IN THE ETERNAL WAR.
SHE CONFIRMS THE IDOL AS GODHEAD, THE PATHWAY TO FREEDOM FROM THIS HELL-- THE WAY TO HEAVEN FOR EVERY QUATRAL!
THE GODDESS' APPEARANCE SIGNALS THAT WE WILL FINALLY DEFEAT THE ZAVISHA AND CLAIM THE IDOL FOR OUR OWN!
AND WHEN THE GODHEAD IS AT LAST OURS, WE SHALL USE IT TO FOLLOW THE GODDESS INTO HEAVEN!

SIX FROM SIRIUS 2 CONTINUES NEXT ISSUE. ON SALE NEXT MONTH.

TRESPASS

illustrated by E[illegible]
written by Jay S[illegible] Gukema

This was no dream. Something was on T-2. Not the usual ice obstruction Project Command jerked him from a nice sleep to fly out and clear. Moving up from where he had landed the jet sled, Dan Baker could make out the top of the tower despite frigid wind stinging his eyes. Something was there. Something alive had violated the perimeter, threatening the Company's prize property. T-2 was almost totally down. Dan could feel the temperature drop. The miserable, supposedly unhabited planet was quickly reclaiming what they had worked months to win. Tugging down his goggles, readying his torch-staff, Dan pushed toward the top of the slope and whatever waited there.

He froze at what he saw. Alien life forms were not common; most on record were little more than annoying insects or quasi-intelligent fungi. This was nothing Dan Baker had read or heard about. And it was big. So much bigger than it appeared from the distance. Fighting panic, he forced his hand to the transceiver on his belt. Command had to know. Anderson and Tenaka, senior pilots of the project team, always kidded him about being an over eager first-timer, anxious to impress the Company. They'd probably think he was making this up. But they weren't *here*, dammit. They couldn't *see* this monster, oozing, sliding, over the rods and coils, making awful, low sounds as if it were digesting the equipment its bulbous, pulsating body covered. As he clicked on the radio with one hand, he thumbed the "on" switch of the torch-staff with the other. Faster than Dan imagined possible, the creature's tentacles were snaking at him, gripping him. *Pulling*. Nerves jangling, the young pilot dropped the transceiver and brought up his torch-staff.

It was a heating/welding instrument. But in a pinch, as Anderson and Tenaka had instructed him in more serious moments, it could be one hell of a weapon too.

In fan mode, the staff could spray heat over a broad area and melt obstructions such as the ice accumulations that plagued the towers. It could also shoot a long, penetrating core of white-hot welding flame. Dan had used it this way during the project's construction. Now he used it to save his life, firing a searing burst as another tentacle shot directly for his face. *Shit!* It did not wither or even draw back. The mucus-bright hide was that tough. And before he could try a second, longer burst, the tentacle was around his head. Coiling. Tightening. Trapping him in darkness. And pressure. First his goggles shattered. Then his skull. At Project Command, over the still open channel of the fallen transceiver, they heard Dan Baker's scream. Only silence followed.

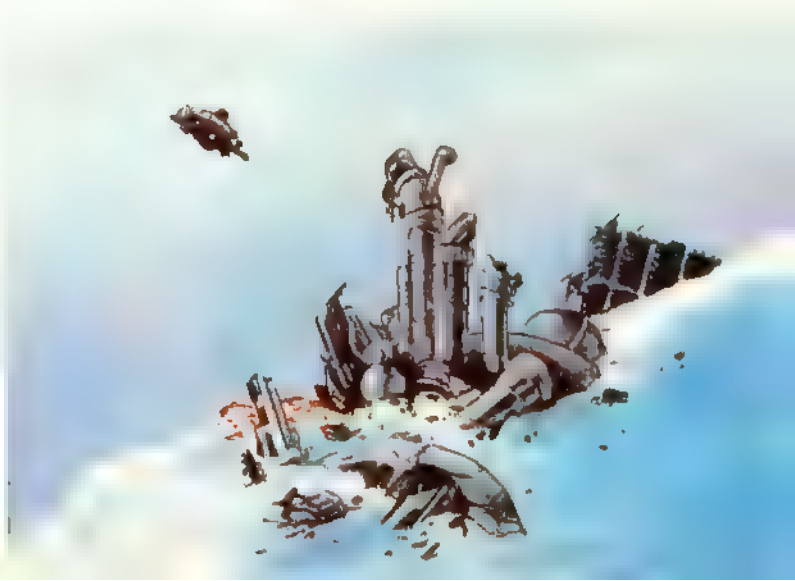
The wind blade blasted upward from the main base launch pit. Larger than the jet sleds, it had hover capability and a weapons pack. The men in its cockpit, Terry Anderson and Ken Tenaka, were tensed to use all their considerable skills with both. The trouble at T-2 had shaken everyone. Along with their concern for Dan Baker was fear for the project. The Company had achieved success taming non-Terra type planets with the environmental fields generated by its weather tower system. Limited success. Too many worlds were hostile beyond taming. Like *this* sub-arctic waste. But if the experimental system being tested here performed to expectation, there would *be* no limits. Everything from crew bonuses to Company prominence was riding on it. And now something *unknown* was trespassing on that dream, throwing it all into doubt.

Project Command reached them by transceiver just as they dropped low through the rising winds and blowing ice for a visual check on the site: "We're now getting negative reactions from T-3, guys. Full panel outage. Just like T-2 when we sent Dan. This mess is *spreading*. We're going to lose the entire field and find our asses permanently *frozen* unless—"

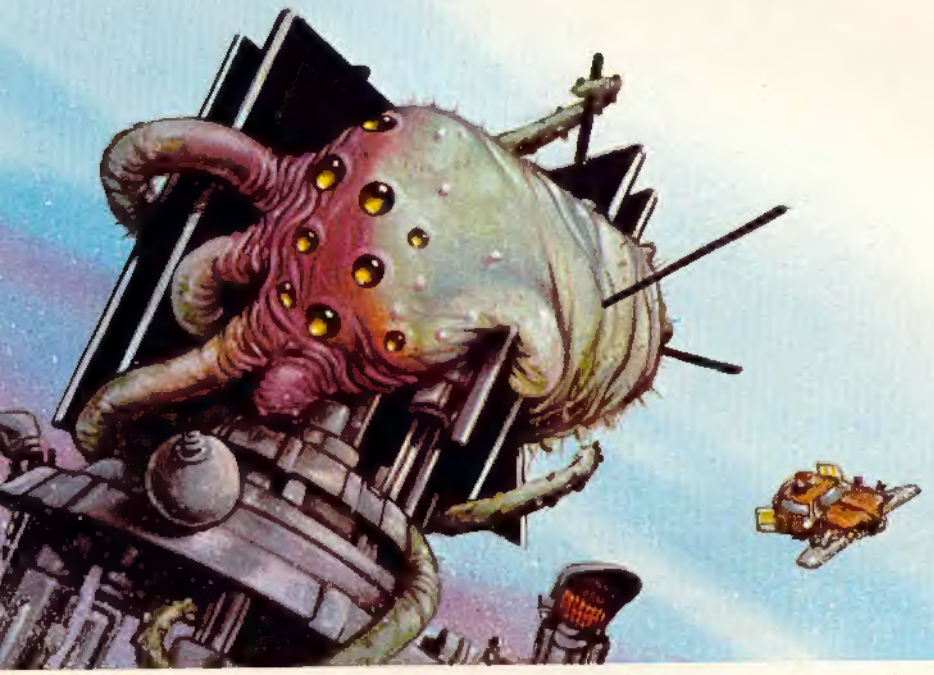
Tenaka interrupted with a shout. "T-2's a *write off!* This isn't some technical failure, *something's* ripped it to bits! And...and...*Oh, hell! Hell!* That's *Baker!* It's *killed* Dan!"

Ken looked to Anderson at the wind blade's controls. Both realized it was worthless to touch down.

"Tell base we're on our way to T-3," Terry said, punching in the burners and executing a violent, instantaneous 5-G pull up, "Whatever did this, we're going to bag it."

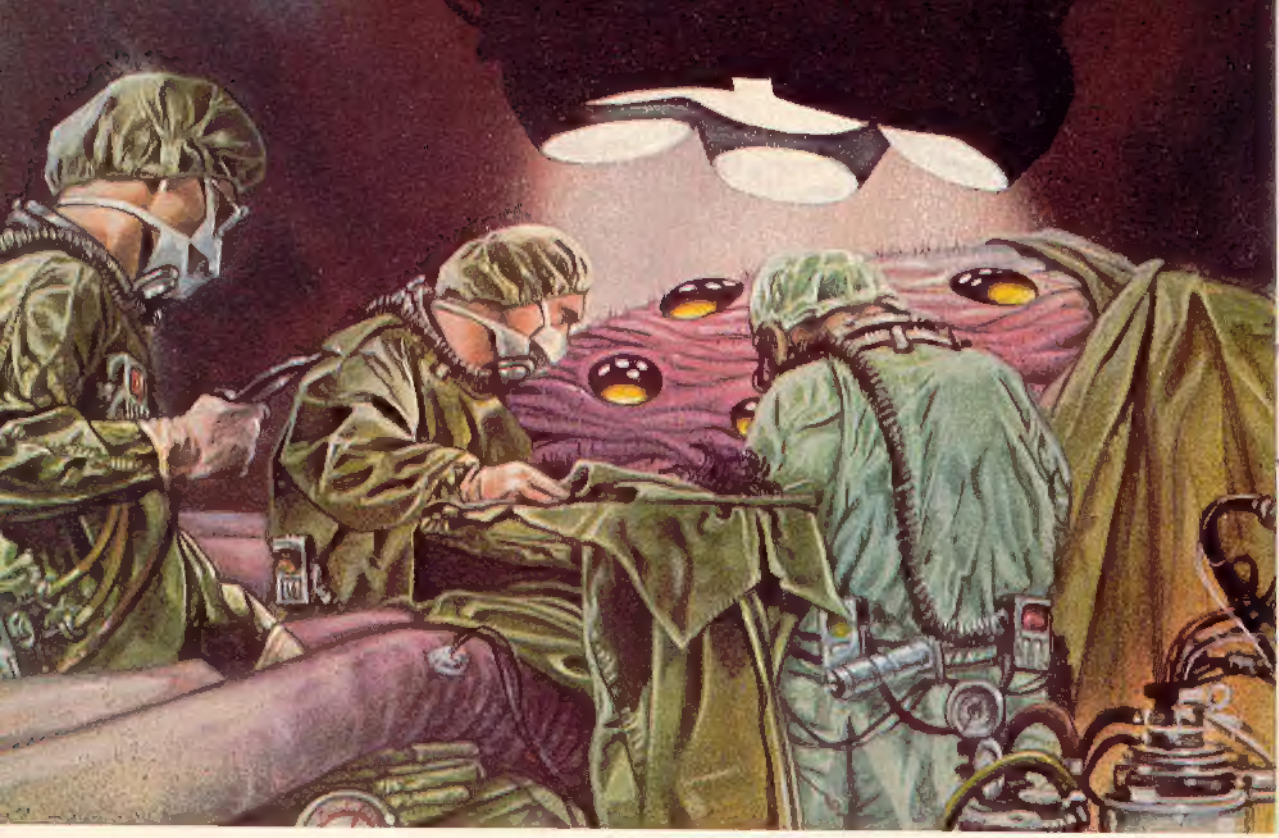


On full augmented thrust, they were over T-3 in moments, despite heavy snow and turbulence as the planet's natural elements raged harder against the Project's collapsing artificial field. What they saw made Terry signal Ken to arm the gun system as he raised Project Command. "Sighted our trespasser. Big, ugly, and seems to follow every move we make. I can eyeball *blood* on one tentacle as we hover. This thing's definitely what got Dan. I'm for blowing it to pieces."



"Negative, Terry." It was Project Commander Lang. "I want the creature alive for a mindscan. This world's officially uninhabitated. Let's learn what we're dealing with. One specimen has almost laid low two-thirds of the system. If there are *others,* we can't afford to be in the dark about them. Forget the eye-for-an-eye stuff. Use a neutralizer, then net it."

It took four passes. Four tries with a 10,000 volt carrier. The thing comprehended what they were up to and kept the tower between it and the wind blade. Finally, their third shot caught it glancingly. Number four nailed it cold. The reflex drug did the rest. Tenaka's net caught the dead weight perfectly and Anderson nosed their straining ship into the relentlessly mounting fury between them and home.



At Project Command base, they were ready. Lang had the entire crew working. They were ready when the wind blade—after fighting the worst weather Anderson and Tenaka had experienced since the Company warp freighter first deposited them on the planet before the towers were up and operational—finally hovered over the launch pit and lowered its living cargo. They were ready with icing tank, drug series, and IV feeders, prepping the unconscious creature for scan even as they rushed it by cargo lift to the lab.

There, Lang, who had started with the Company as a Science Officer, took personal charge. Too much was at stake for him not to.

"Chill sequence is set, Commander."

"All right," Lang said, "let's start bringing it down. Give me a reading at every five degrees negative. We'll stop at minus 25. Get the video implant in now. Stand ready to adjust the serum flow. We've never worked with anything this big before."

Outside, the wind and ice whirled with extra ferocity, but deep in the bowels of the underground base no one noticed. All eyes were on the scanner's large video monitor as Lang signaled ready.

"We've got something, Commander. It looks like... It is. It's T-2. There's Baker!"

"Hit our subject with 100 volt rapid reverse impulses. Let's get it back first, then we can run ahead."

Suddenly they were looking months back through alien memory.

"A *shuttle,* Commander! This thing isn't *native,* it was dropped off here like *we* were and—Hell! There's a whole *settlement* of them!"

Lang stared intently. "Not *just* a settlement. Jump him ahead. Fast."

Images flashed. Weeks became seconds. Patterns emerged. Life. Death. The room grew silent as the sights accumulated and registered on the watchers.

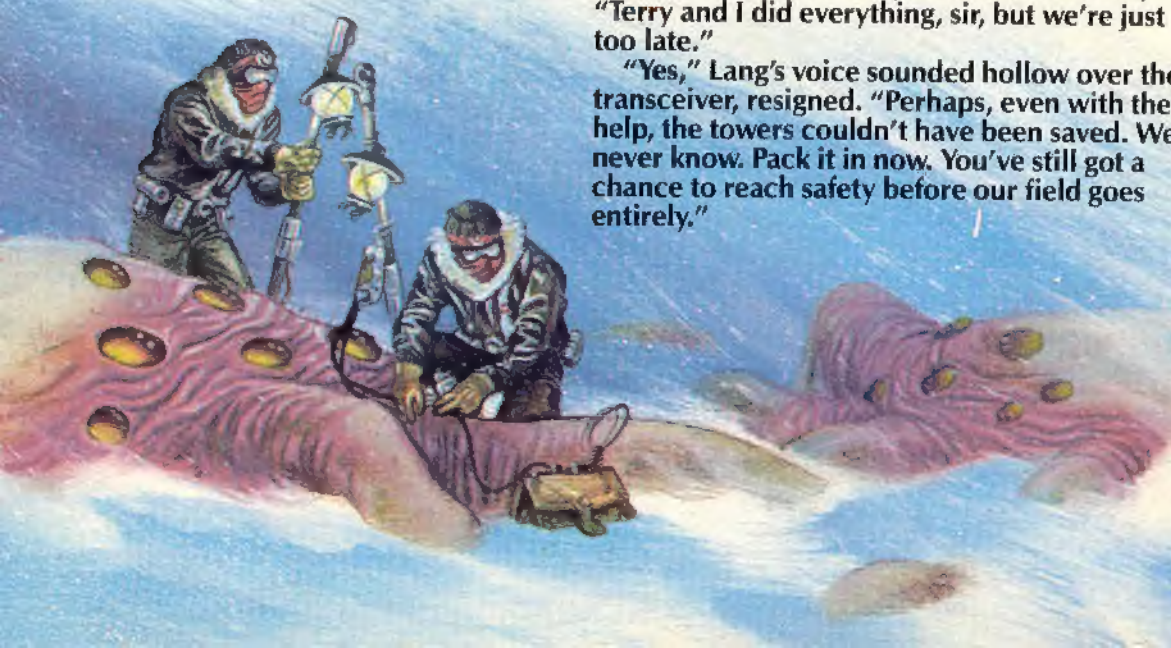
"Oh, God," Lang said, "O, my God."

Anderson and Tenaka inched away from the wind blade through gale force winds. Base estimated they had an hour. Beyond that, despite the ship, despite their gear, the perpetual ice storm that was the planet beyond their collapsing environmental perimeter would destroy them. Just as it had destroyed the alien settlement. Except for three survivors. The creature's scan indicated two others of its race still alive.

"This is where they should be, Terry," Ken said through their transceiver link, "Don't do anything with the equipment they can interpret as threatening. Dan Baker's torch-staff apparently scared the one we captured into attacking. Right now we *need* each other too much to—"

He saw them through the swirling ice, and recognized the ragged pulse, the fading color. There would be no attack. These two were exhibiting the same symptoms as the creature at the base after Lang's scan. When it died.

The Company and the aliens never knew they were competitors. The galaxy was big enough for a time to prevent contact. The environmental field the Company created with weather towers, the creatures accomplished through psychic mindlink. But both were drawn to this raw, raging planet as a perfect place to demonstrate their ultimate mastery. The aliens' psychic power led them to discover they were not alone. In the face of aggressive competition, they stepped up their own efforts to succeed. So much so that they found themselves physically vulnerable. Most of their number perished before they became aware of their failure, their arrogance. And aware that the Project's mechanized towers, though more successful, were in an accelerated state of stress that would soon bring them ripping apart as they fought back against the rising planetary storms. They saw one chance for survival. If they could *meld* their psychic field with the towers' output...



Too late," Tenaka reported back to base, "Terry and I did everything, sir, but we're just too late."

"Yes," Lang's voice sounded hollow over the transceiver, resigned. "Perhaps, even with their help, the towers couldn't have been saved. We'll never know. Pack it in now. You've still got a chance to reach safety before our field goes entirely."

Safety. Tenaka wondered. The base was set deep, maybe they *could* hold out until the Company freighter's next stop. Maybe. But already as he and Anderson started away, the wind was spreading a veil of ice over the creatures they'd failed to save. Maybe he and the others would be luckier. Maybe. But now they knew from the scan what the aliens had learned before them. The environment fields failed against this world's raging weather because their very functioning churned its wild elements into even *greater* turmoil. We trespassed, Tenaka thought, and a planet this savage doesn't deal with trespass forgivingly. He gave one last glance back as the wind bit deeper, blew harder. The two forms were almost totally obscured. Another moment and they might never have existed at all.